

Status of Fish Population in Keokee Lake 2003 Edition

Keokee Lake is a 92-acre lake located in Lee County, in Southwest Virginia. The lake is surrounded by forested land, and provides a beautiful setting for a fishing trip. Anglers can expect to find largemouth bass, and bluegill sunfish in average abundance. Redear and pumpkinseed sunfish, and channel catfish are also present but in fewer numbers.

The lake's fishery has been poor for several years. The number of bass collected per hour of sampling is about average for small impoundments in Southwest Virginia. However, the size structure of the bass population is well below average. Only about 15 percent of adult bass collected are greater than 12 inches in length. No bass over 15 inches have been collected since 1997. The overall condition of bass in the lake is also below average. There are not a lot of sunfish in the lake, but there are some big ones.

When the lake was constructed in 1975, much of the timber within the lake basin was left standing for fish habitat. Over time the trees have deteriorated and toppled into the lake. Although trees and brush can provide good fish habitat, the accumulation of fallen timber now prevents boats from accessing some areas of the lake. The problem is compounded by the fact that water and ice support the submerged portion of a standing tree, so that the break often occurs at, or just below, the water's surface. The remaining stump or stob then becomes a navigation hazard. It is difficult for anglers and boaters to avoid bumping into these stobs, and a boat can easily get lodged on top of one that is hidden just beneath the lake's surface.

In 2002, a project was initiated to draw down the lake and remove much of the fallen timber to improve boat access and increase public safety. The project was a cooperative effort of the Department and the U. S. Forest Service, Clinch Ranger District. The improved access will allow more thorough fish population sampling, as well as increase the management options in the future. For instance, improved access would allow biologists to fertilize the lake to increase productivity. During the time that the lake is drawn down, the exposed soil will be aerated and should re-vegetate naturally. This process will add nutrients to increase the lake's productivity as it refills.

All of the water was not released from the lake during the draw down process. A conservation pool was maintained so that fish in the lake would remain there until the lake refills. Biologists also plan to stock fingerling largemouth, bluegills, redears and channel catfish when the project is completed. Together with increased productivity due to the re-vegetation of the lake shoreline, these stockings should pave the way toward a new and improved fishery at Keokee Lake.

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